

Montgomery County bans parking vehicles on front lawns

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October 27, 2010

Montgomery County on Tuesday banned cars from the front yard, joining many Washington-area jurisdictions.

But some are calling the crackdown a veiled attempt to punish immigrants for lining residential properties with tow trucks, mobile eateries and stationary cars.

"Who do you think is parking these vehicles?" Councilwoman Valerie Ervin, D-Silver Spring, said to *The Washington Examiner*. "If we're honest with ourselves, this really is targeting the new immigrant population. This is the biggest wedge issue there is right now."

The new law comes in the wake of a string of complaints in Aspen Hill -- a pocket that stretches between Rockville, Silver Spring and Wheaton -- about front yards that resemble parking lots.

The County Council approved the stricter regulations, backed by County Executive Ike Leggett, with Ervin and Council members Nancy Floreen and Mike Knapp voting against the change.

But some immigration advocates supported the shift, saying it will improve the residential feel of many communities.

"As somebody who happens to be a native Spanish speaker, this is part of the responsibility of being a good neighbor," said Councilwoman Nancy Navarro, D-eastern county. "It is a two-way street."

Roughly 15 percent of Montgomery County's 1 million residents are Hispanic, according to census data -- twice as high as the state average.

Montgomery's new law mirrors those in much of the Washington region.

Earlier this year, Loudoun County prohibited residents from parking on the grass and paving over their front yards to create makeshift parking lots.

For years, it has been illegal to park in front yards in both Prince George's and Fairfax counties.

Still, some say the law fails to address major problems, such as overcrowding of houses and clogged streets.

And others called it another example of government intrusion.

"This is discrimination," said Lily Fu, of Potomac. "People need those ugly-looking vehicles to bring bread and milk to the table. They are hard-working people. They didn't steal, didn't rob."

The bill also puts tighter rules on those who use their houses for business purposes, as residents are now required to prove they live at the home.

Homeowners are allowed to park one light commercial vehicle, such as a tow truck, in a residentially zoned lot.

Leggett spokesman Patrick Lacefield acknowledged the new law would affect immigrants. To prepare residents, he said the county would spend \$25,000 on an outreach campaign, focusing extensively on the Hispanic community.

The county will begin enforcing the law in six months.